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ABSTRACT

The issue of using language proficiency or language dominance to assess programs for high school students with limited English speaking backgrounds is addressed. The development and initial analyses of the Competency Based Oral Language Assessment (COLA) are discussed. Three components of oral language are rated separately: semantics; syntax and morphology; and phonology. The use of COLA is based on guidelines suggested by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare: (1) to determine the language proficiency of students whose primary language is not English; (2) to prescribe programs which meet students' needs; and (3) to assess students' language dominance to determine the most beneficial language of instruction. Instrumentation; content validity; predictive validity; scoring; interrater reliability; evidence and correction for rater bias, and procedures for interpreting results of COLA are explained, and four case studies are presented as illustrations. It is emphasized that COLA does not assess students' overall intellectual ability or aptitude, and that a clear distinction should be maintained between language proficiency and language dominance. It is suggested that proficiency scores be used for placement into special language programs, while dominance scores be used to plan individualized program activities or strategies. (MH)

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What Is the Criterion of Interest in Identifying Limited-English Speaking Students: Language Dominance or Proficiency?

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What Is the Criterion of Interest in Identifying Limited-English Speaking Students: Language Dominance or Proficiency?

This paper presents the development and some initial analyses of an instrument which was developed for use in assessing the language proficiencies of high school students. However, the primary purpose of the paper is not to focus on the specific instrument but to attend to the process which logically follows in implementing programs developed to assist students with limited English speaking backgrounds.

The results of the processes and outcomes described in this paper are proposed as procedures which will generalize across instruments, programs and language groups. Specifically, the issue of using language proficiency or language dominance in meeting the mandate for equal education opportunities is addressed.

The remainder of the paper includes a review of the background leading to the development of an instrument, a presentation of evidence of the reliability and validity of the instrument and a discussion of issues related to the use of the instrument.

Nature of Oral Language

The task of accurately assessing the language development of limited-English and non-English speaking students is especially challenging since data regarding specific language assessment procedures are very limited. In 1976 the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory produced for the U.S. Office of Education Oral Language Tests for Bilingual Students, which was a first attempt to meet the critical need to develop and disseminate language assessment instruments and procedures. This

publication provided basic information which was used first to screen tests which are available and later as a guide in developing the Competency-Based Oral Language Assessment (COLA, 1977) instrument and the rating procedures.

Since the COLA is a measure of speaking, and not a measure of listening, reading and writing, the discussion of the characteristics the COLA measures will be limited to oral language. It is assumed, however, that listening skills are utilized in the test and that students who can function orally in English have probably managed to function aurally as well.

The four language skills mentioned above are acquired in the following order: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Each of the skills possesses the three characteristics of language: meaning (semantics), arrangement and grammar (syntax and morphology) and sound (phonology). The best assessment of any of the language skills will encompass all three characteristics. For example, in assessing semantics, it is necessary to examine the student's definitions of words. In measuring syntax, it is necessary to examine word order. In measuring morphology, it is necessary to check use of proper morphemes, the smallest speech segments carrying grammatical meaning. Finally, in measuring the phonology characteristic of oral language it is necessary for a student to reproduce that which is heard. It is with these assumptions and guidelines in mind that the COLA was developed.

It was decided that three components of oral language could be distinguished as separate and identifiable factors which could be rated on a scale:

1. Semantics
2. Syntax/Morphology
3. Phonology

Impetus for Assessing Oral Language

Local education agencies have been charged with the responsibility of providing equal education opportunity to every student, regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, marital status or handicap. To date, there have been four major legal authorities that have shaped educational activity in the area of oral language education. The first of these is the rather broad scope of Section 601 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which states that no one shall be denied the benefits of, excluded from participation in, or discriminated against under any federally assisted program, based on their race, color or national origin. On May 25, 1970, HEW issued a Memorandum to districts with more than 5 percent national origin-minority group children stating that districts must rectify language deficiencies of these children if their inability to speak and understand English excludes them from effective participation in the instructional program. The Memorandum was tested in 1974 in the Supreme Court case of Lau v. Nichols, where the Court ruled in favor of 1,800 Chinese students who alleged that the schools violated the Equal Protection Clause and Section 601 of the 1964 Civil Rights Act in not providing supplemental English courses. Another major document, The Equal Educational Opportunity Act of 1974, covers districts not covered by Title VI concerning language barriers.

When not found to be in compliance with regulations specified by HEW, school districts are instructed to complete the following four steps as suggestions for an effective plan. These are:

(a) Identify students whose primary or home language is other than English

(b) Assess the linguistic proficiency of these students

(c) Diagnose the achievement levels of these students

(d) Place students in programs designed to meet their educational needs

The task facing many districts was in identifying or developing methods to identify students' primary or home language and if it was not English, their linguistic proficiency and dominance.

Purposes of Testing in General

Tests are administered to people for a variety of reasons. Scores are used to select persons for schools or jobs in which the score acts as an estimate of performance on some external criterion. A test score may be used to ascertain that a person has met some designated standard, as in formally entering some profession. Tests are used clinically in a continuing relationship between a test user and an individual as new information modifies tentative judgments. Test scores may constitute the criterion on which programs may be continued or terminated. Scores are also used in the application of different treatments to individuals who obtain different scores, the hypothesis being that people who score one way on a test will perform a task better with one form of treatment than another. The COLA was developed for this last purpose. The assumption that students equipped with varying competencies in oral English will be able to participate in educational programs with varying degrees of effectiveness is the underlying purpose for the development of the COLA.

Purposes and Applications of the COLA

The purposes and applications of the COLA follow directly from the previously mentioned suggestions to school districts from HEW

1. To determine the linguistic proficiency of a student whose language is other than English by examining the score received for the other language and the score received for English
2. To prescribe a program which best meets the student's educational needs, such as English for Speakers of Other Languages, High Intensity English Programs or Bilingual Programs, based on the English proficiency score
3. To determine the language dominance category by assigning the student to either Monolingual Other, Predominant Other, Bilingual, Predominant English or Monolingual English based on the student's Dominance Score (the Other Language Score minus the English Language Score), so that the special program teacher can determine the kinds of teaching strategies and activities from which the student will benefit most

In summary, a measure of oral language proficiency for use with high school students was developed to fulfill the objectives outlined above. The issues discussed earlier were considered in the development of the measure. Various methods and techniques were reviewed and considered in order to obtain an accurate, representative sample of students' oral language and to accurately assess the obtained samples.

Instrumentation

In order to determine which students will be administered the COLA, a screening process was developed. All students were given a Student

Language Information Questionnaire (SLIQ). If either their first language, most spoken language or parents' language was other than English, their parents were sent a Home Language Preference Questionnaire (HLPQ) for cross-validation. If HLPQ responses jibed with the SLIQ, the Compentency-Based Oral Language Assessment (COLA) was administered. If not, their teacher completed a Student Language Preference Teacher Observation (SLPTO) for cross-validation. If SLPTO responses supported the SLIQ, the COLA was administered, and if not, the screening was terminated. These procedures are outlined in Figure 1.

Content Validity: Rationale for the Method of Assessing Oral Language

To determine which factors of oral language facility could be rated by listening to recorded speech samples, the Oral Language Tests for Bilingual Students (1976), available oral language tests, e.g., Basic Inventory of Natural Languages (1974), Language Facility Test (1968), James Language Dominance Test (1974), Shutt Primary Language Indicator Test (1975) and Pictorial Test of Bilingualism and Language Dominance, and "What Characteristics Can Experts Reliably Evaluate in the Speech of Black and Mexican American Children?" (1972) were reviewed.. The result was to identify three components which could be rated. To communicate to raters what each component consisted of, definitions were formulated:

(1) Semantics--Ability to communicate meaningful ideas, thoughts, concepts, reactions

(2) Syntax/Morphology--Ability to use the grammar of the language in sentences

(3) Phonology--Ability to produce accurately the distinct sound features of the language

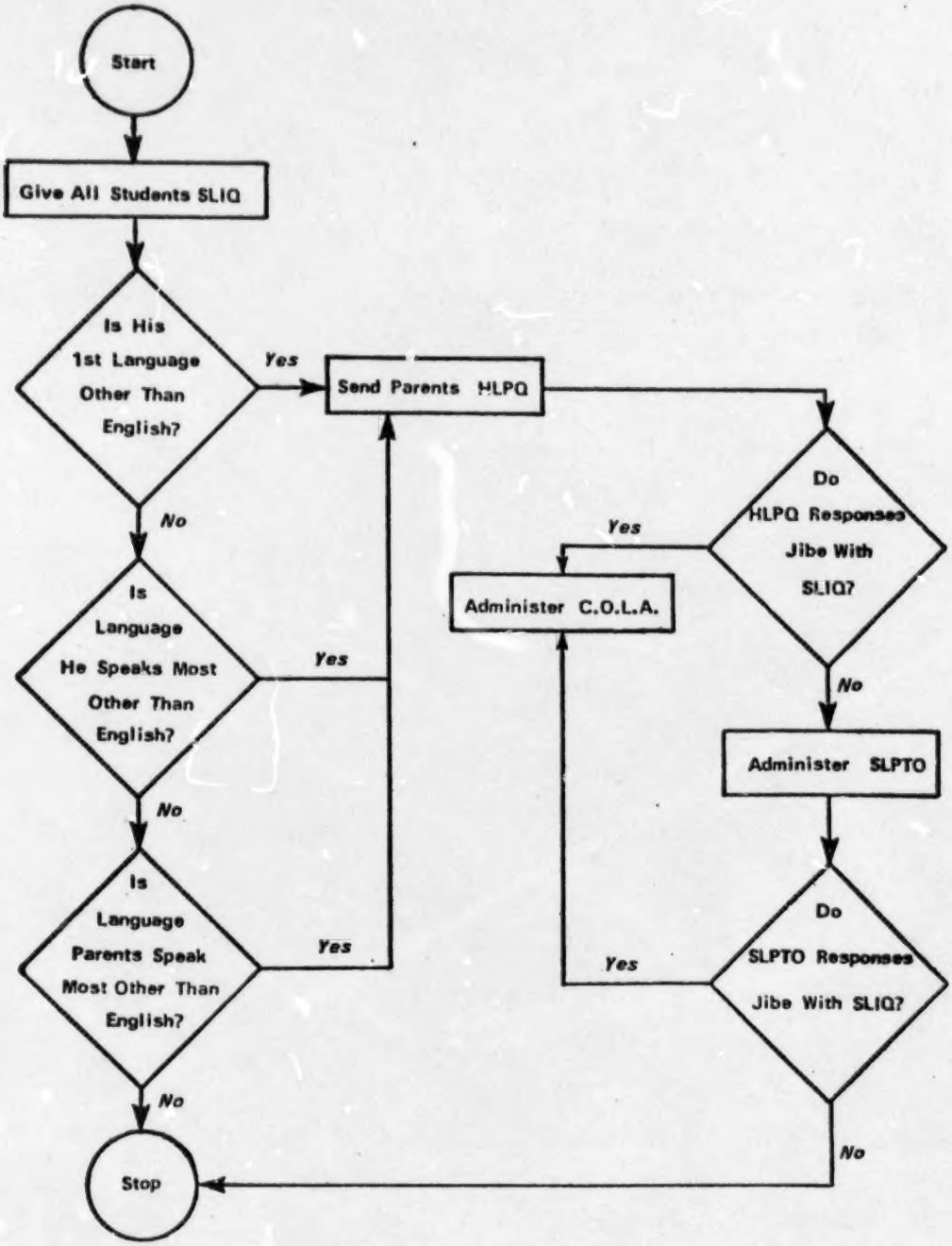

Figure 1. Student Screening Process Decisions Flowchart

A holistic scoring procedure for rating the speech samples was adapted from the 1969 National Assessment of Writing. This procedure used trained readers to read an essay, form an overall impression about its quality and assign it a score according to a previously established scale.

In 1975 similar holistic scoring procedures were used to rate the essays in the assessment of the writing performance of California high school seniors. Separate scoring instructions, developed for each exercise by an advisory group of English teachers, were examined and refined by the judges in the light of their own writing experiences. Holistic scoring procedures were used to rate the essays. The judges read each paper for a total impression and then made a global or holistic judgment which was expressed by a number ranging from 1 to 9 for most essays. All essays received two independent ratings. Significant discrepancies between ratings were reconciled by the judges or a third party if necessary. The two numbers were added together for a total score. Procedures similar to these were used to rate the oral language samples. The criteria outlined in Table 1 were used with the definitions for each factor in rating the tapes.

To adapt the procedure for speech samples, this process was followed (Adler, 1972):

(1) A decision was made to use a 5-point scale with "1" being low, "5" high and "3" in the middle ranges.

(2) Six to ten people, i.e., bilingual interns, English and bilingual supervisors, English teachers including one bilingual, and foreign language teachers listened to approximately 30

Table 1
Criteria for Rating Oral Language Samples

Semantics--Meaningful communication of information

(5) This student comments about the picture in grammatically correct sentences that communicate complete thoughts with subject-verb-object relationships expressed.

(3) This student comments about the picture in grammatically incorrect and/or incomplete sentences but complete ideas are communicated. Comments tend to be identification of persons, object or actions in the picture rather than expression of ideas or reactions.

(1) This student comments about the picture with single nouns or verbs and linking words only to identify objects or to describe actions. Student does not communicate complete thoughts or form sentences.

Syntax--Uses of the grammar of the language in sentences

(5) This student's responses are made in grammatically correct sentences. Subject-verb-object relationships are expressed. The student controls most grammatical structures of the language, especially verb tense and word order.

(3) This student's responses are made in grammatically incorrect or incomplete sentences. There is a lack of some grammatical concepts, such as complex verb forms, possessive pronouns or plural forms. Some common non-standard usage may be present.

(1) This student's responses are single word identifications, usually nouns, or objects or people in the picture. The student may mix words of the two languages if sentences are attempted.

Phonology--Sound features of the language

(5) The speaker's intonation pattern is that of a native speaker of the language. The vowel, consonants and blends are accurately produced and accent is placed on the correct syllable.

(3) The speaker's intonation pattern, vowel, consonant and blend sound production and word accent will sometimes be appropriate for the language being spoken and will sometimes reflect the other language. This student mixes English and other language sounds about equally.

(1) The speaker's intonation pattern reflects that of the other language. There is a substitution of sounds from the other language. Consonant clusters are reduced or dropped, especially at the end of words. Accent is placed on the wrong syllable or syllables may be added.

pilot tapes which contained English and Spanish. Each oral language sample was categorized as high, middle or low using the holistic technique.

(3) Descriptors or analytic score guides were written which attempted to describe the primary traits of the high, middle and low speech samples for each of the factors: semantics, syntax and phonology. The high, middle and low were converted to score points 5, 3 and 1, recognizing that some samples fell between and would be rated 2 or 4. The scoring guides on the tests mentioned earlier proved very helpful, especially the Dailey Language Facility Test (1968).

(4) A decision was made that just as the National Writing Assessment used range finders, i.e., papers which received the same score from three independent raters and were used in training raters, that anchor tapes were needed, i.e., speech samples in each language which three developers agreed were representative of the high, middle and low categories on all components: semantics, syntax and phonology.

(5) Because sex differences were recognized in speech samples, tapes of both boys and girls were gathered for each of the "5," "3" and "1" anchor points, but it was later decided that for training and rating purposes a single set would be adequate since listening to a double set of tapes would be too time consuming.

(6) Anchor tapes for training raters were prepared by rerecording on a single tape the "5" in English, the "5" in Spanish; the "3"

in English and the "3" in Spanish; and the "1" in English, the "1" in Spanish. The anchor tape is approximately 12 minutes long.

(7) It was determined that raters would need to be bilingual so they could rate both English and Spanish and thereby remove a possible source of error due to rater bias.

Specifications Followed in Selecting Stimuli

The two criteria for the selection of the twelve photographs used to elicit responses were high school student interest and their oral responses. The twelve most frequently chosen photographs from a group of forty were selected for use in the COLA by 32 students from three high schools in the Phoenix Union High School System.

Scoring

Students' taped responses were scored on a scale of 1 to 5 (high) on each of three language components: semantics, syntax and phonology; these ratings were then summed for both an English and an Other Language proficiency score ranging from 3 to 15 points for each language. A student's English score and Other Language score were the mean ratings of two raters who were fluent in English and the other language. If the individual raters' ratings differed by more than two points, a third rating was used in the calculation of each score. Dominance scores resulted from subtracting the English proficiency score from the Other Language score.

Evidence of Predictive Validity

Sixty-three students from four high schools who were identified as having language backgrounds other than English were categorized into one

of the five dominance categories by (1) self-assessment, (2) interviewer assessment and (3) teacher or other school personnel assessment. The first two assessments were obtained in an interview with the student by a person fluent in both English and Spanish, the other language for this sample. The teacher or other school personnel assessments were made by individuals who directly observed the students in school situations and who expressed confidence in being able to judge the actual dominance category. Consensus among the three criteria was reached for 30, or 48 percent of the 63 students.

Using the COLA as a predictor, 19, or 63 percent, of the 30 students were correctly classified into one of the five language dominance groups. The criterion for correct classification was the dominance group on which all three personal judgments were in agreement.

In a second analysis made on the total group of 63 students whose actual dominance category was determined by agreement on at least two assessments, it was found that 39, or 62 percent, of the 63 students were correctly classified by the COLA.

The results of the two analyses are encouraging because the accuracy of COLA classification, i.e., 62-63 percent, is substantially greater than the accuracy of personal judgments, i.e., 48 percent. In summary, a 14-15 percent increase in the accuracy of placement was obtained with the COLA when compared to the agreement among personal evaluations of students' dominance classification. These results are evidence that the COLA will be a significant improvement over personal judgments in classifying students according to relative oral language proficiencies.

Concurrent Validity

COLA English, Spanish and Dominance scores and Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills (1973) Reading, Language and Math scores were available for 74 high school students. These correlations are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Correlations of CTBS and COLA Scores

COLA \ CTBS	Reading	Language	Math
English	.45	.28	.30
Spanish	.26	.07	.27
Dominance[1]	-.18	-.22	-.02

[1]Dominance "score" of 1 = Spanish Monolingual and 5 = English Monolingual.

Although these correlations are based on a relatively small sample, they exhibit the same trends found by Silverman and Russell (1977), i.e., English oral language correlates as highly with CTBS English and Reading as Spanish oral language or Dominance scores.

Evidence of Interrater Reliability

When scores for 103 tapes based on two raters were analyzed, the reliability of the ratings were .80 for English tapes and .86 for Spanish tapes. These reliabilities were obtained by computing correlations between the ratings and correcting for ratings based on two raters using the Spearman-Brown prophecy formula since all ratings are based on a minimum of two raters.

In another analysis, 11 rater pairs rated between 20 and 78 tapes per pair. Using z-scores, the mean correlation between pairs of ratings was computed for English and Spanish tapes. The mean reliabilities of ratings based on two raters were .77 for English tapes and .90 for Spanish tapes. The correlations, number of tapes rated, means and standard deviations for the 11 rater pairs are presented in Table 3.

Although these reliabilities would probably be judged adequate by most, it should be noted that these reliability estimates are lower bound estimates of the reliability of these scoring procedures due to the restricted range in these samples. The restriction in range for these initial reliability estimates was due to the fact that these tapes were for students who had already been screened for limited English speaking ability or other language backgrounds. Additional support that restriction in range produced lower bound estimates on the English ratings is obtained by examining the relations between the standard deviations for the English and Spanish ratings. The standard deviations for the English ratings are consistently lower than the standard deviations for the Spanish ratings and thus might account for the lower English reliabilities.

Evidence and Correction for Rater Bias

Using the data from the previous analysis, it was found that rater bias was evident in 5 of the 11 rater pairs, i.e., the means of the raters' ratings of the same tapes were significantly different. The variances, however, were homogeneous, i.e., none of the variances for pairs of raters were significantly different. Thus, it appears that rater bias is only evidenced in measures of central tendency.

Table 3*

Correlations (r), Number of Tapes Rated (n), Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) for Eleven Rater Pairs' Ratings of English and Spanish Language Samples

Ratings		First Pair		Second Pair		Third Pair		Fourth Pair		Fifth Pair		Sixth Pair	
		R_1	R_2	R_1	R_2	R_1	R_2	R_1	R_2	R_1	R_2	R_1	R_2
English	r	.72		.42		.48		.74		.53		.53	
	n	66		64		78		20		57		40	
	M	9.24	9.33	9.28	10.06	10.18	8.29	10.05	10.15	12.12	12.12	11.10	9.15
	SD	1.44	1.44	2.02	1.93	2.28	1.70	1.39	1.73	2.20	1.67	1.86	2.33
Spanish	r	.80		.71		.70		.94		.76		.83	
	n	66		64		78		20		57		40	
	M	7.53	8.21	7.62	8.67	9.28	8.62	7.45	8.50	9.98	11.53	7.65	7.12
	SD	2.11	2.28	2.64	2.72	3.33	2.92	3.28	3.41	3.28	2.42	3.12	3.08

*continued on following page

Table 3 (continued)

Correlations (r), Number of Tapes Rated (n), Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) for Eleven Rater Pairs' Ratings of English and Spanish Language Samples

Ratings	Seventh Pair		Eighth Pair		Ninth Pair		Tenth Pair		Eleventh Pair		Average	Corrected
	R_1	R_2	R_1	R_2	R_1	R_2	R_1	R_2	R_1	R_2		
English r	.73		.68		.47		.77		.59		.62	.77
n	74		24		9		22		12			
M	10.28	10.38	10.62	10.21	9.56	11.67	9.50	10.09	10.83	11.42		
SD	2.35	2.38	2.02	2.59	1.67	2.18	1.90	1.77	2.04	2.02		
Spanish r	.86		.86		.82		.73		.80		.82	.90
n	74		24		9		22		12			
M	9.31	8.34	10.08	9.21	8.89	7.78	9.05	9.64	8.92	8.42		
SD	3.53	2.91	2.69	3.12	3.98	3.99	3.00	2.26	3.18	3.45		

To correct for this rater bias, a composite score based on two raters is calculated. If the raters' scores differ by more than 2 out of the possible 15 points, a third rater's score is averaged together with the other two ratings.

General Procedure for Interpreting Results

After a student's COLA has been administered and scored, the following information will be available: an English proficiency score, an Other Language proficiency score and a Dominance score. The English and Other Language proficiency scores will fall between 3 and 15. The Dominance score will fall between -12.0 and +12.0. By examining the English proficiency score, a judgment can be made as to which English speaking program would probably best suit the student's needs. One convenient way to categorize these programs would be according to the intensity of the instruction in oral language usage, i.e., by the length of class time, criticality of oral language skills, number of meetings per semester. For example, if three intensity levels existed, then students whose scores were between 3 and 6 would attend high intensity programs, those with scores between 7 and 10 would attend middle intensity programs and those with scores between 11 and 15 would attend low intensity programs or the regular English curriculum. These priorities are depicted in Figure 2.

Once teachers have students assigned to them and are to teach a particular type of English speaking program, they have available to them some additional information about their students' abilities in addition to their English proficiency levels. By examining students' Dominance scores, they can plan the type of individual, small group and large group

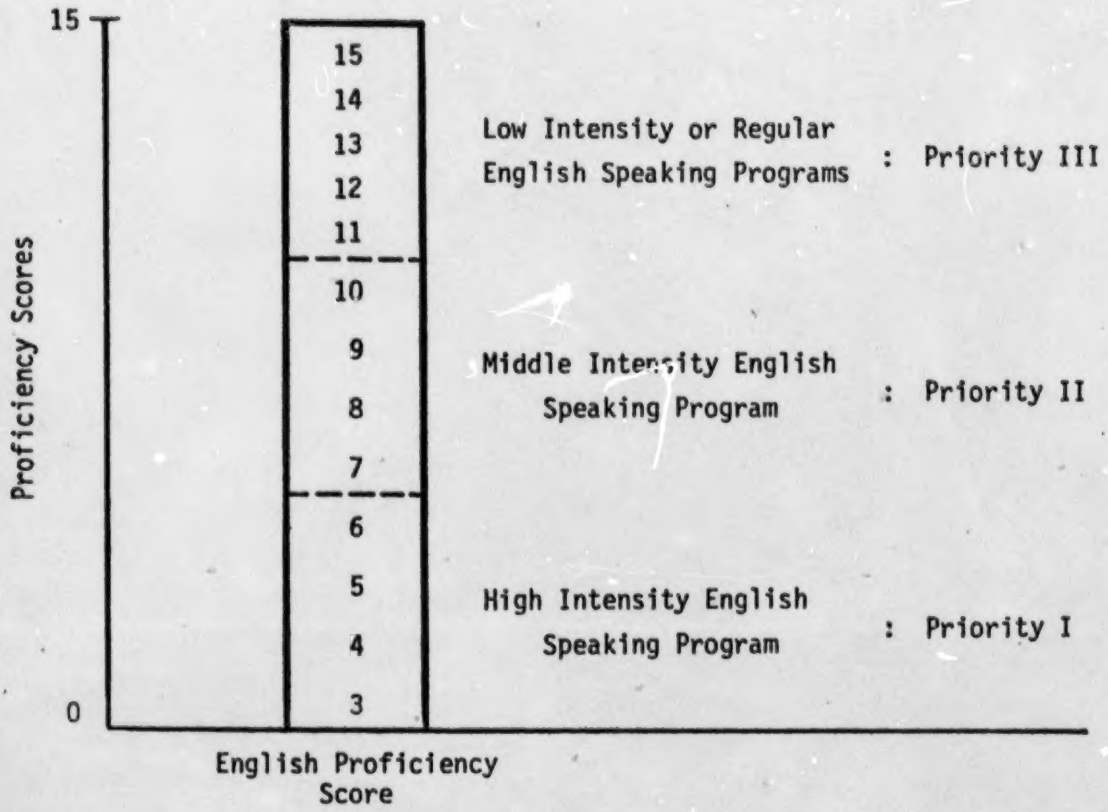

Figure 2. Competency-Based Oral Language Assessment interpretive key: placement priorities

instruction with more awareness of each student's needs. For example, knowing that a student falls into one of the dominance categories in Figure 3 aids a teacher in choosing the language with which to begin communication, in planning the composition of student work groups, in being aware of student experience differences, in being aware of students' knowledge of cultural subtleties, in arriving at approximate reading levels and in planning the complexity and length of assignments.

Case Study Examples

The following four case studies are presented so that the general procedure is explicated through actual data. In Table 4 below, four students and their COLA scores are presented.

Table 4

Case Study Data

Student	English Proficiency Score	Other Language Proficiency Score	Dominance Category
Mario P.	6.0	13.5	Predominantly Other
David E.	6.0	3.5	Predominantly English
Susan D.	9.5	9.5	Bilingual
Martha C.	12.0	14.5	Predominantly Other

Both Mario P. and David E. fall into the highest priority group as far as needing English speaking instruction. However, their Dominance scores place them into different Dominance Categories which imply

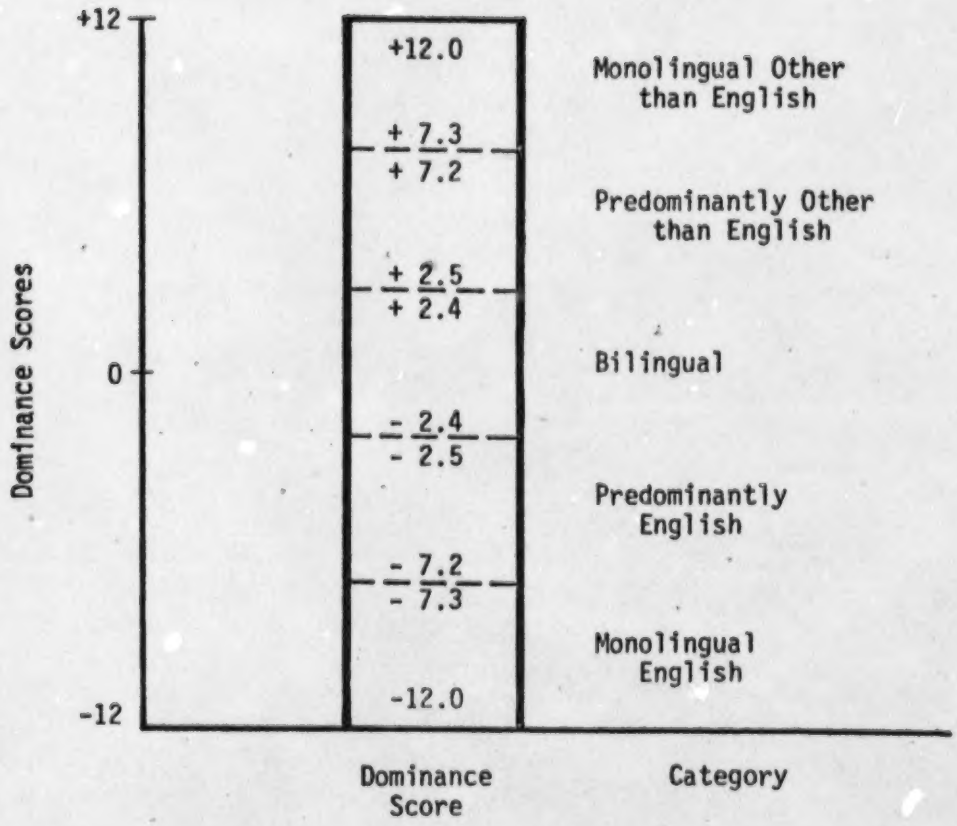

Figure 3. Competency-Based Oral Language Assessment interpretive key: dominance classification

different instructional considerations. Mario is much more proficient than David at a second language. This capability makes it more likely that he will be able to handle more complex assignments and make faster progress than David. Indeed, if they speak the same other language, Mario's and David's experience levels and knowledge of American culture may be quite different and may warrant different assignment types and topics. For example, using the content areas as vehicles for English instruction would probably be appropriate for Mario but not especially appropriate for David.

Susan D. and Martha C. are both fairly proficient in English; however, Susan is less proficient than Martha. Susan is also functioning at a similar level in another language, so it appears that her skill level in one equals her skill level in the other. She would benefit just as much from a program in the other language as a program in English, but since she will probably need her English skills more in future scholastic work, it would be wise to enroll her in a middle-intensity English program. Her proficiency in the other language makes it likely that she will make good progress. Martha happens to be very proficient in another language and almost as proficient in English. She falls into the lowest priority placement because of her high level of functioning in English. Although her Dominance Category is Predominantly Other, this will serve as an added skill in situations where she finds the other language useful. Students with extra skills beyond adequate English speaking skills are probably not thought of as priority concerns by most educators. However, it is of obvious value to develop and maintain proficiencies in more than one language as staff and resources will allow.

Possible Misinterpretations of Test Scores

The Competency-Based Oral Language Assessment does not provide an assessment of an individual's overall intellectual ability or aptitude. Scores derived from the COLA should be strictly interpreted as the individual's current proficiency in speaking English and another language. It should be remembered that a multitude of factors have undoubtedly contributed to these observed levels of proficiency.

A clear distinction needs to be maintained between language proficiency and language dominance. When the oral speaking proficiency of an individual is the criterion of interest as is the case in planning programs and placing students in programs for limited-English speakers, language dominance is of minor use. Guidelines provided by various task forces might be misinterpreted as justification for using a student's dominance in two languages as the criterion from which placement into a program designed for limited-English speakers is made. It is proposed that placement into and priorities of need for special programs for limited-English speakers should be based on English proficiency scores. As stated earlier, the dominance score will be useful in planning particular program activities or strategies which are designed for each individual student's need and background.

Finally, it is estimated nationally that two-thirds of the ESEA Title VII students were not classified as Predominantly Other or Monolingual Other, and were therefore labeled misclassifications. If the criterion for accurate placement was the English speaking proficiency of these students, the percent of misclassifications might be drastically reduced. The procedures outlined in the Lau Remedies lead to inefficient approaches.

In summary, if one is interested in assisting students with limited-English speaking ability with special programs, all evidence supports using English speaking ability or proficiency as the criterion for identification. This paper has attempted to outline a procedure which was developed for use in assisting to meet the needs of limited English speakers. Hopefully, the reader will not focus on the many inadequacies with the particular instrument, but will find the considerations outlined as important and reasonable when making decisions.

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